COMMONWEAL

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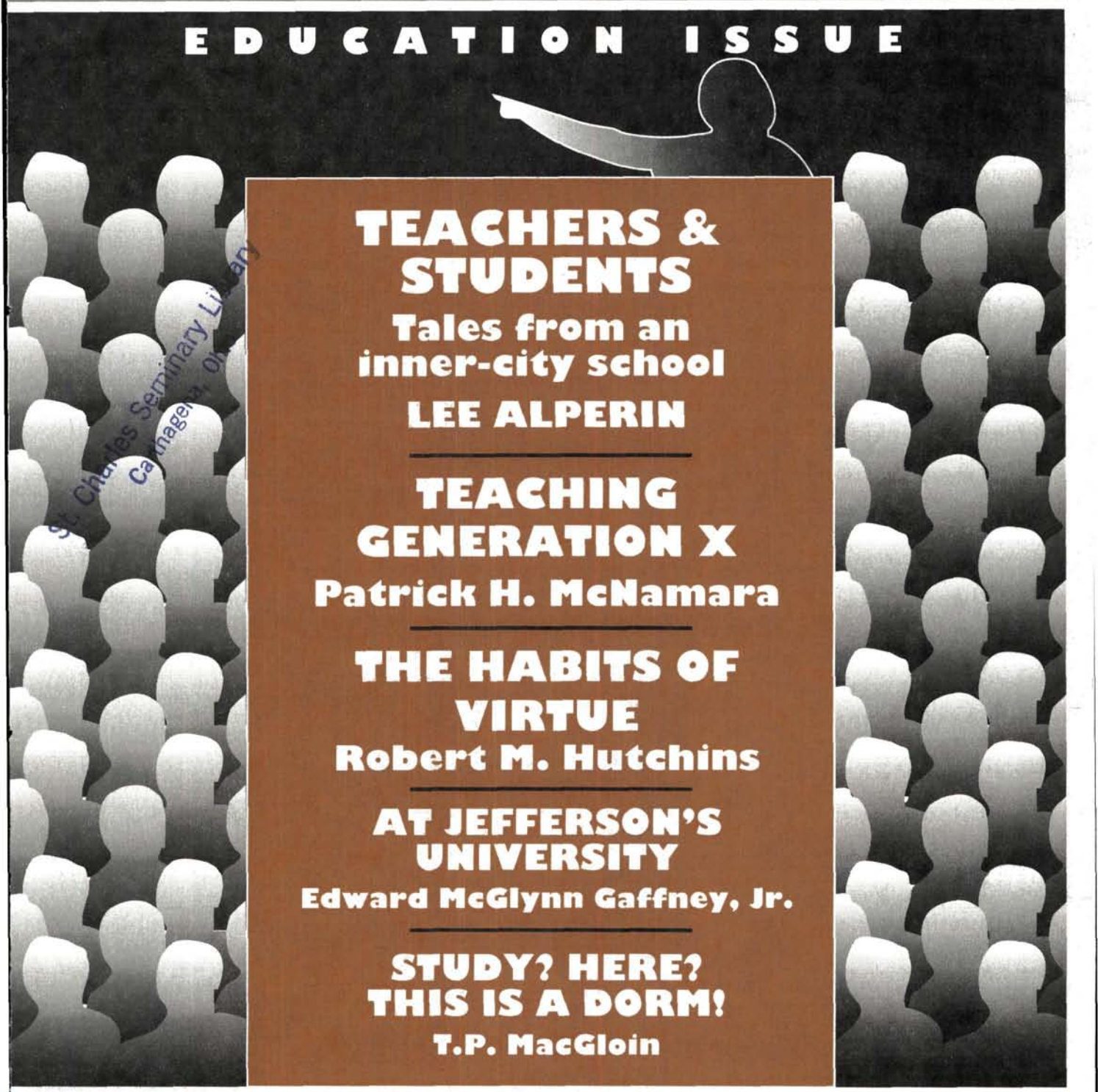

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CORRESPONDENCE

The burden of guilt

Republic, Mo.

To the Editors: In "The Epidemic of Forgiveness" [March 24], Gordon Marino claims that forgiving one's self is not as honest as it looks. From a strictly moral-theological perspective, he's right. The source of that kind of forgiveness is not one's self but God. Further, when we humans forgive others who have injured us, our ability to do so also derives from God.

But there is another perspective, the spiritual-psychological. In my ministry as confessor and retreat director, I have encountered far too many folks who have indeed been theologically and morally absolved from their real guilt, but who carry the burden of false guilt in their hearts, sometimes for years, because they cannot accept it that they have allowed themselves to be so sinful. At least, so sinful as they see it. What God sees, I prefer to suspect, is an entirely different matter.

Thus, to me, it makes great good sense to encourage another so burdened to close the matter by forgiving her/himself for having behaved so sinfully, or so crudely, or so cruelly. At issue is how one perceives God, and how one accepts or does not accept oneself as an ordinary human being quite capable of even dreadful sin.

I am relatively certain that there are countless other confessors and spiritual counselors who still regularly meet the kind of clients who, in addition to accepting God's merciful forgiveness and the forgiveness of fellow human beings, need to forgive themselves in the sense I have described.

ERIC KAHN, O.F.M.

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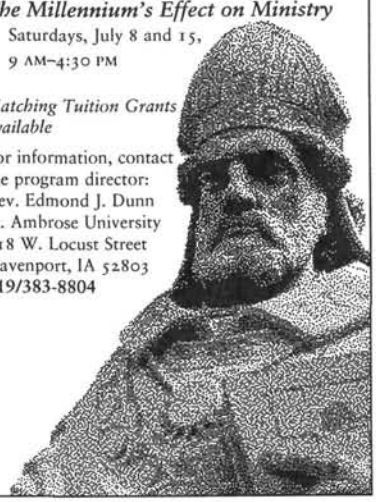

Welfare defended

Jamaica, N.Y.

To the Editors: Your "Tough Love" editorial [March 24] starts right out with an apparent truism: "Welfare isn't working. On that, everyone agrees...." I ask two questions about this assumption. First: For whom is it not working? For the woman who has run from an abusive relationship in the hope of protecting herself and her child? For the single young man who was attacked and stabbed and will not be able to work for many months? For the young widow with young children?

"Working" can be ambiguous in some contexts. When our 1980 Volkswagen makes unearthly sounds because it needs a mechanic's attention, we don't say it isn't working. We say it is working but needs to be fixed. I believe welfare works as a safety net for many people in desperate need but isn't working flawlessly.

My other question: *Which* welfare isn't working? Apparently the multiple forms of corporate welfare described recently in the *New York Times* [March 7, 1995, page D1] are working very well for the corporations involved but not so well for the common good of our country. And the low taxes of the very rich in our country are likewise working very nicely for them.

My basic point: We won't get far in our search for economic justice if we begin by saying welfare isn't "working." On that, not all agree.

MICHAEL WARREN

From the editors: We wholly agree that "working" can be an ambiguous word, but we think that in this instance the context (everything in the editorial after the first sentence) makes its meaning clear: The welfare system is absolutely necessary, but, like Mr. Warren's Volkswagen, it needs fixing.

(Continued on page 28)

CORRECTION Owing to an editorial error, the last paragraph of Mary Ann Glendon's March 24 review of Philip K. Howard's *The Death of Common Sense* should not have appeared in the review proper. It was an excerpt from the book, and was meant to be printed as a box quote accompanying the review. Our apologies.

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Culture of death?

John Paul II's moral passion and religious conviction are as invigorating as they are challenging. *Evangelium vitae* ("The Gospel of Life") conveys a genuine and deep concern for the transcendent value of all human life. It is formidable for the consistency of its argument, and for the extent to which it is steeped in Scripture and a confident evangelical faith. All people of good will should be eager to embrace the pope's steadfast, often eloquent defense of the unborn and those threatened by euthanasia. The encyclical does not mince words about the objective evil of abortion. "I declare that direct abortion, that is, abortion willed as an end or as a means, always constitutes a grave moral disorder, since it is the deliberate killing of an innocent human being," John Paul writes. Consequently, Catholic health-care professionals have a "grave and clear obligation to oppose [abortion and euthanasia] by conscientious objection." Having emphatically reiterated the church's teaching, the pope acknowledges the social and economic pressures that encourage such killing. He assures the penitent, and especially women who have had abortions, of God's mercy and the church's care.

The encyclical comes down hard on politicians who are content with the status quo. "In the case of an intrinsically unjust law, such as a law permitting abortion or euthanasia, it is therefore never licit to obey it, or to 'take part in a propaganda campaign in favor of such a law, or vote for it.'" On the face of it, this confronts pro-choice Catholics with a stark choice. The "privately opposed, but..." rationale is judged deficient. Policies that permit abortions but are designed to reduce their number may be tolerated, but the argument of those who champion a "woman's right to choose" must be rejected. "Right to die" referendums and laws must similarly be resisted. "Choices once unanimously considered criminal and rejected by the common moral sense are gradually becoming socially acceptable," John Paul warns. "Conscience itself, darkened as it were by such widespread conditioning, is finding it increasingly difficult to distinguish between good and evil in what concerns the basic value of human life."

In further defense of that "basic value," the encyclical narrows the use of capital punishment that may be considered compatible with Catholic teaching. Justification for the state to resort to such measures is "very rare, if not practically nonexistent." In this vein, much of the encyclical calls on Catholics to demonstrate by their own actions a witness to the absolute value of life.

These are welcome words. With great clarity and in the face of powerful opposition, John Paul writes of modern society's demand for "efficiency" and of the way in which individual autonomy can lead to "a war of the powerful against the weak." There is much truth in his picture of how the "self-centered concept of freedom" erodes social and moral bonds. Modern secular society must contend

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with a strong pull from pluralism toward moral relativism and even nihilism. John Paul asks that those ready to temporize about the absolute sanctity of life in the name of "choice" or "compassion" draw back before the moral foundations of society collapse beneath them.

But at least three aspects of the encyclical impede the "courageous cultural dialogue among all parties" the pope says he wants. First, in characterizing modern society as "a veritable structure of sin" and a "culture of death" while implicitly reserving for the church the appellation "the culture of life," the pope is asking for a high level of forbearance from his putative dialogue partners. Moreover, the pope's certainty about right and wrong carries with it the demand that what is "gravely" evil be suppressed. Faced with such a prospect, "other parties" will be understandably suspicious about "dialogue" that can lead to only one conclusion.

Second, the way in which the pope writes about women continues to be an enormous handicap. *Evangelium vitae* calls for a "new feminism," but there is nothing new in its praise of the "true genius of women," which is little more than a paean to idealized motherhood, and a paean offered in relentlessly masculinist language. In a sense, this attitude follows inescapably from the encyclical's unremitting critique of modern society, one of whose conspicuous features is the success with which women have taken on responsibilities outside the home. The culture that the pope sees in "grave moral decline" many women prize as making good on the promise of equality.

It is easy to affirm the pope's high regard for motherhood. But motherhood is no longer the sole end of a woman's life. A culture that enables women to contribute outside the home should be welcomed, not maligned. Effective contraception has played a crucial part in that social transformation. The pope's repeated condemnations of the so-called "contraceptive mentality" make no effort to recognize the genuine moral goods married couples seek to balance in the use of contraception. Once again the authority of papal teaching is lessened by the conceptual trap created in *Humanae vitae* and its predecessor, *Casti connubii*.

Finally, *Evangelium vitae* too often suggests that abortion and euthanasia are the means by which hedonistic moderns indulge in sex and dispense with the burden of caring for the sick and dying. If only matters were that simple. In rightly defending the "absolute" value of human life, the pope's rhetoric and style do not fully acknowledge the complexity of the political situation. Individual rights and personal autonomy are the philosophical bedrock of Western society. Abortion and euthanasia are particularly difficult questions because they cut to the heart of the endlessly negotiated relationship between self-determination and social or moral duty in cultures where negative freedom (freedom from control), not positive freedom (freedom for the good) has long been regarded as the surest guarantee of life and liberty. Catholicism, the pope avers, insists that the meaning of freedom is "found in its orientation to the true and the good." "Democracy," he writes, "cannot be idolized to the point of making it a substitute for morality or a panacea for immorality....Its 'moral' value...depends on conformity to the moral law."

Our contemporary moral and political conversation desperately needs to be challenged by that Catholic tradition and perspective. But for better and for worse, a unanimity of opinion about the moral order—and especially about the equation of freedom and truth—is no longer the natural condition of democratic cultures. Given the pope's harsh words about liberal societies, it is worth noting that societies with stricter abortion laws or even more explicitly Catholic cultures have not proven themselves better defenders of human dignity. Has the absence of "moral relativism" in Catholic Croatia, Rwanda, or Argentina protected the weak? Were the hegemonic ages of Christianity better guardians of the "true and the good"? What "conditioning" was it that darkened all those consciences uncontaminated by pluralism, the contraceptive mentality, or the loss of a sense of transcendence?

One need not deny the immorality of abortion or euthanasia to resist the sometimes narrow frame of the pope's argument. It is worth remembering that the conscientious objection the pope urges on Catholics is a quintessential expression of modern individualism and tolerance. Representative democracy is built upon a system of checks and balances that presupposes conflicting interests and even irreconcilable visions of the good. John Paul must continue to preach conversion, but he need not mistake the West's culture of conflict and moral pluralism—and, yes, grave sin—for a culture of death. Our moral center of gravity has shifted on many questions, but judging modern democracy uniquely depraved is neither plausible nor persuasive. Pluralism and democracy are not substitutes for truth, but neither are they the enemies of the true and the good.

Liberal society may yet rise to the moral threat John Paul so courageously opposes. At least in a season of new life, when the church celebrates the Risen Lord, that is our prayer.

REPORT FROM COPENHAGEN

A U.N. FOCUS ON POVERTY

GROWING A GLOBAL CONSCIENCE

The poor you shall always have with you. Well, can we think about that? Last month's Copenhagen UN summit on social development called for a new moral consensus on poverty. Toward that end, a week-long global town meeting addressed the needs of the poor. Before listening to Mitterand, Mandela, Kohl, and some of the other 130 heads of state who spoke to the summit, I spent the week with ordinary people whose stories suggested real progress against the grinding poverty that grips one-fifth of the world's people.

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Of course, delegates from 185 countries were in attendance. But in addition to the formal state delegations, more than twenty thousand volunteers came from local equivalents of United Way organizations in towns and villages across the world. I met with hundreds of grassroots organizers, microcredit officers, local entrepreneurs, transnational CEOs, journalists, jurists, teachers, and students from around the world. Perhaps more than anything else, Copenhagen was the nongovernmental organizations' [NGOs] summit. And in that sense, it was a global trade show, state fair, and town meeting. The wares on display were mainly ways to improve the quality of life from the grassroots up.

Copenhagen's was the fourth of six UN conferences to be held over a six-year period. Taken together, the meetings cover the curriculum for global change in the post-cold war world. The first conference, held in 1990 in New York, focused on the child. Then, in 1992, the Earth Summit convened in Rio. The Vatican made the third summit on population and development in Cairo a front-page story. Copenhagen's agenda was poverty, unemployment, and social disintegration. The Women's Conference, scheduled for September 1995 in Beijing, is already in preparation, while the Habitat Conference in Istanbul is in development for 1996.

The format for these international meetings usually entails official government delegations meeting alone or with each other each day. The delegations then meet in plenary sessions where the language of the summit document is negotiated. On the last two days of each conference, heads of state arrive. Each is given seven minutes to speak before the summit declaration is publicly ratified.

There seems to be some uncertainty about the purposes of the UN summits, especially in the press in the United States. At the height of the cold war, "summits" brought the U.S. and USSR together to sign treaties with very specific outcomes. But in the aftermath of the cold war, international summits can focus on social and economic issues, and, perhaps more important, allow leaders and citizens from all 185 UN states to come together to address common concerns and to develop a common vocabulary.

In this regard, modern communications technology is having a dramatic impact. The so-called rebels in Chiapas, for example, used a Powerbook to send stories out across the globe. Some of the Zapatistas spoke at the poverty summit. Connections made at these meetings can now easily be sustained across great distances. More important, governments are finding it more and more difficult to hide the real conditions of their peoples.

Because of the generous spirit of the Copenhagen organizer, Juan Somavia, Chile's ambassador to the UN, almost all the summit's business was open to members of NGOs. This marked a significant change in the relationship between the nongovernmental organizations and the formal UN structure which normally focuses on the needs of the state delegations, closing most meetings to nondelegates.

After a plenary group meeting of national delegations spent sixty-seven minutes arguing the merits of the wording "extreme poverty" vs. "abject poverty," I concluded I preferred NGO caucuses. At the NGOs' sessions solutions to problems were shared. I heard CAPE (Children's Alliance for Protection of the Environment) lay out problems and progress related to child labor in Kenya. The Legal Research and Resource Center for Human Rights discussed governmental and social obstacles facing Southern NGOs in achieving sustainable development. The Women's Caucus is a powerful force led by former Congresswoman Bella Abzug. The Values Caucus, the Peace Caucus, the Development Caucus, and others cross-pollinate stories and ideas and create new alliances, new friendships. University groups led daylong symposia. I attended one called "Reclaiming Civil Society in the Global South." I also attended "Rethinking Social Development," where Wole Soyinka, Rolf Dahrendorf, Amitai Etzione, and Johan Galtung, among others, examined the future of the nation-state, economic growth, and social cohesion. UNICEF, UNESCO, and other UN offices also held open forums, as did the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund.

Mrs. Clinton addressed the summit on the importance of education for girls. The United States has committed $10 million to the education of girls in Africa, Latin America, and Asia. Much more is needed. Enthusiasm greeted Al Gore's announcement that 40 percent of U.S. aid would be allocated to NGOs. Statistics suggest that over the past decades as much as a third of the foreign aid to the third world has been used for bribes or pocketed by unscrupulous leaders. A similar amount has gone for military expenditures, often fueling regional wars. While there are certainly some problems with NGO leadership, common sense and recent studies suggest that local groups can spend aid money more efficiently. Grants and loans as small as $50 to $100 can initiate substantial change. Data from India's Grameen Bank and from Women's World Banking show that often these grants are matched by funds saved by local people, thus paving the way from poverty to self-reliance. Default on these loans is less than 2 percent.

Over the last two hundred years, the moral consensus of the world community on slavery and torture has changed dramatically. Since the 1970s, a social conscience about pollution has also been developing. The voices I heard at Copenhagen, emphasizing working with the poor not for the poor, sounded as prophetic as those of Abraham Lincoln, Franklin and Eleanor Roosevelt, and Martin Luther King, Jr. I think the new millennium will be the time to rethink poverty, and the Copenhagen summit made it possible to hear the birth of a dramatic new moral consensus on that issue—not a big bang, but something more like quickening.

CLAIRE L. GAUDIANI

Claire L. Gaudiani is the president of Connecticut College in New London, Connecticut.

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FREEDOM FROM, NOT OF, RELIGION?

One of the most important First Amendment cases on the docket of the Supreme Court this term is *Rosenberger* v. *University of Virginia*. It involves basic issues of fairness deriving from the Free Speech and Free Press provisions of that amendment, and the university's claim that the First Amendment's Religion Clause prohibits public funding of a student publication that is religious in character.

The University of Virginia operates a fund derived from compulsory student fees to support student activities such as public lectures and newspapers. Ronald Rosenberger and other Christian students at the university petitioned for a share of this student activity fund to support the cost of producing an alternative student publication called *Wide Awake*. The stated purposes of this group are "to publish a magazine of philosophical and religious expression, to facilitate discussion that fosters an atmosphere of sensitivity to and tolerance of Christian viewpoints, and to provide a unifying focus for Christians of multicultural backgrounds." The magazine offered Christian perspectives on issues of public concern such as racism, crisis pregnancy, homosexuality, and the relative morality of capitalism and socialism. Relying on the Establishment Clause, the university denied funding to *Wide Awake* because the magazine is designed to advocate a particular religious belief.

The Court might use this case to expand its teaching about the Establishment Clause. But it is more likely that the Court will simply reaffirm its free-speech and free-press precedents. These cases clearly teach that the government may not prefer secular speech over religious speech, at least when the speakers are private parties rather than government officials. To do so, the Court has explained, violates principles deeply embedded in the First Amendment, such as governmental neutrality and the equality of all speakers in public forums.

The Court has repeatedly held that the government may not engage in discrimination on the basis of the content of speech, and it has been even clearer in prohibiting discrimination by the government with respect to differing viewpoints on the same matter. This line of cases creates a serious difficulty for the university in the *Rosenberger* case. The university gave funding to 118 other groups, including the Muslim Students Association, which publishes a magazine that presents an Islamic viewpoint on issues of world affairs. The university also supported the Jewish Law Students Association, a group whose purpose is "to encourage Jewish law students to participate in Jewish activities." How can the university support some religious perspectives and not others? The university maintains that it does not draw an unfair line between various religious groups, but only supports groups engaged in *cultural* rather than *religious* activity.

There are several problems with this view of the case. First, the line between religion and culture is a difficult one to draw. Muslims promoting Islam are not religious? If one really thinks that is so in Charlottesville, Virginia, at least it should not be shouted by Americans from the rooftops of Baghdad or Teheran. Second, the distinction that the university draws is difficult for the government to enforce without becoming very intrusive in matters that are literally none of its business. There might indeed be a difference between a devout, religiously observant Jew and a merely "cultural" or "ethnic" Jew, but the government should not be in the business of policing that distinction among the Jewish law students at Charlottesville (or anywhere else). Third, it seems that the commitment of Mr. Jefferson's university to multiculturalism runs along a line that all cultures are equal, except that some cultures are more equal than others. Discrimination of this type is a subtle form of censorship of opinion by the government that should be repugnant to all freedom-loving Americans.

The lower court concluded that discrimination of this sort is clearly *prohibited* under free-speech and free-press principles, but is *required* by the provision against a governmental establishment of religion. This interpretation of the First Amendment fragments its provisions and places them at odds with one another. It makes mockery of James Madison's efforts to provide in the First Amendment a strong bulwark against any governmental control

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over the things of the mind and heart. In the words of the Williamsburg Charter, a bicentennial document celebrating religious freedom, "The right to freedom of religion is the foundation of, and is integrally related to, all other rights and freedoms secured by the Constitution." For that reason it makes much better sense to seek for a harmonious interpretation of the text of the First Amendment than to treat it as a jumble of conflicting goals in some sort of constitutional tug of war.

If the Court rules for the students rather than for the university, it will reinforce the religious pluralism of the Founders of our republic. The First Amendment does not mandate a relentlessly secular society, where religious expression is frowned upon and religious persons are denied the privileges afforded other citizens. A text designed to promote free and open exchange in the marketplace of ideas should not be construed to encourage students to hide the religious bases for their opinions, or leave them unexamined. Under the rule that the university adopted, college students would be less likely to encounter religious perspectives on public controversies, even though religious perspectives may play a significant role in dealing with those very issues outside the university context. That is no way to train students to be informed and responsible citizens. Students at public universities who are exposed to a wide variety of secular viewpoints should also be able to hear a variety of religious voices as well.

The University of Virginia would limit religious speakers on its campus to denominations wealthy enough to supply the funding for student publications that the university discriminatorily denies. Under this approach, students will inevitably graduate with a hollower education than they might have had. This cannot be the right interpretation of the First Amendment, which is committed to protecting open engagement with conflicting ideas. As Justice William Brennan put it: "Religionists no less than members of any other group enjoy the full measure of protection afforded speech, association, and political activity generally. The Establishment Clause...may not be used as a sword to justify repression of religion or its adherents from any aspect of public life." □

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TELL ME IN MY EAR, TEACHER

TALES FROM AN INNER-CITY SCHOOL

LEE ALPERIN

I began teaching in New York City in the fall of 1962. I was assigned to Eli Whitney Vocational High School, now defunct. Whitney was, in the parlance of the time, a "ghetto school." The pupils were a tough group. They would learn, if one made them. At the start of every class they tested the teacher. It almost seemed as though they demanded a struggle, requiring the teacher to put himself out before they did.

How does a teacher survive in the classroom? How does he take control? The odds for success are not in his favor. He is one against thirty or forty, and once he shuts the classroom door, he is without immediate means of assistance. He has no gun or nightstick, not even a uniform. He is forbidden the use of force, almost to the point of not being able to defend himself. How then does he manage? He has one thing: his authority. In that struggle for supremacy behind the door of his classroom, the teacher is allowed nothing else.

Those who succeed in this struggle often triumph where family, clergy, and law enforcement have not. I remember Tom Dolan, perhaps the finest English teacher I have ever seen. Tom would take pupils who I was convinced could not read, have them learn dozens of pages of a script and perform in the school show. Pupils too shy to read aloud in my class he got to sing on the stage. Tom made rough, disruptive kids feel the concern he had for them. In the classroom he came across as a teacher who could inspire, a teacher whose pupils would not dare to let him down. But in this business one cannot be a tough guy one day and a softy the next, and Tom's teaching technique, though natural-seeming to outsiders, required constant application. I could imagine him holding out at Whitney for about ten years, at the most. The pupils, remember, always remain fourteen to eighteen while the teacher keeps growing older. His or her energy, effort, and concern all flag in an atmosphere not congenial to aging gracefully. Here, for example, is the effect the process can have on someone who stayed too long.

Miss R. was another colleague of mine, a woman then in middle age, who gave the impression of looking older than she was. Intellectually, Miss R. was as smart as they come. Unfortunately, she did not teach. She clocked in and out each day, showed up for her classes, kept exemplary records, attended meetings, and received satisfactory ratings from the principal. Still, she did not teach. She attempted to, perhaps, and failing that, would write on the board for the pupils to read pages 87 to 92 of the class text and answer all questions on page 92. Miss R. would then sit at her desk to stare or read, while her pupils pleased themselves. If her department chairman or principal dropped in, Miss R. would indicate that she had given the class its assignment. A proper lesson plan—complete with aim, motivation, development, and summaries—rested on the desk. Miss R. had her tenure; nothing could be done. After all, she had been receiving satisfactory ratings for years.

Miss R. greeted but few of her colleagues, and among those none was her friend. She wanted no one to like her. If you tried to, she would cut you dead. I wondered how she could sever all connections—first from her pupils, later from her colleagues—and whether in time that might also happen to me. If I could not manage to be the equal of Tom Dolan, I certainly had to discover a way to survive better than Miss R.

Fortunately, there were other examples of classroom management. There was Miss Winifred Deane. Though no higher than five feet, Miss Deane stood taller than any of her students, and most other teachers. She was gloriously black and the model of propriety.

"Stop trembling, Ferguson, they can sense fear."

LEE ALPERIN *was for twenty-seven years a teacher in the New York City public school system.*

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One term I taught in a room next to hers. At the time, Miss Deane had to come from a distant area of the building and could not reach her class until after the bell. Coming late to class at Whitney could be an unfortunate thing for a teacher. He could arrive to discover an empty classroom or, perhaps, part of a class, the rest of which he would have to chase through the halls. Miss Deane had her students trained to stand in the hall, double file. Sometimes in waiting they got slightly careless, but as soon as Miss Deane was spied coming toward them from far down the corridor, they snapped to.

Manner stern, stride purposeful, she would approach with an implacable air of determination. She would look the boys over, trying to read from their faces whether any irregularities might have occurred. After giving the group a nod, she paused while someone came up to take her books, another her briefcase. Miss Deane would then unlock the door. Under her watchful eye all marched into the room in silence. By the time she followed them in, they were already in their seats. She did not have to utter a sound, and once inside, she did not have to raise her voice.

What key did this woman hold to be able to elicit a respect that eluded many bigger, stronger, even louder teachers? She merely insisted on the proprieties of a well-run classroom. She believed in them and made no concessions. If she taught literature, grammar, essay writing, or whatever, she made the stakes for learning seem important. The pupils believed that if Miss Deane was teaching something, it should be learned. I also have the feeling that a certain warmth touched the boys when she stood back on her heels, her shoulders squared, and expected an effort from them. Here was teaching authority at its purest, a display of nerve and assurance before the toughest possible audience: kids grown up to respect only street law.

I am able to say from personal knowledge that the role Miss Deane took on had its costs. She ended her school day dead tired. It is not easy to kindle such an effort five times a day. The stamina for it has to be supported by an inner force, a discipline that does not come with the territory but derives from sheer will.

I stayed at Whitney five years. Some time after I left, I heard that Winifred Deane had retired. Tom Dolan had applied for and received a transfer to prestigious Stuyvesant High School. Miss R. remained. She could afford to.

It is ironic that despite the dedication teachers put into their work, they can never be sure of how lasting their efforts turn out. A teacher's lessons are not an exact science, and even if effective, any accurate measure of their success remains elusive. On occasion, though, there comes a teacher whose work contains an immediacy precluding guesswork. Such a teacher was Dave Fields (name changed).

No one could possibly stand in greater contrast to Winifred Deane or Tom Dolan than Dave, except that Dave, too, was not ordinary. He had a certain genius, the nature of which is not simple to pin down. Dave was disorganized, often late for class, and awful at keeping records. At times he walked the halls in a daze. If advised to be more professional, he looked at you as if you did not speak his language.

Somehow he got away with it, with everything....With so much seeming to go against him, it was amazing that Dave could teach at all, especially in so difficult a place as Eli Whitney. But not only did he teach, he got his students so involved in his class that almost every lesson became a vital experience. Here is the way one of those lessons might go.

Coming late, Dave finds the girls restless and milling about the room. It would appear that they pay him no mind. But that would be misleading. It is simply their way, since no self-respecting group of pupils would want a teacher to walk in complacent. An effort is in order here to gain their attention. Once in class, though, Dave becomes transformed, someone fired by a mission. He raises his arms for attention. The sound of his voice clashes with the din. Evidently something just a bit more is required.

"All right, girls! Don't make any plans for the summer!"

The students become still, some with mouths hanging open in midsentence.

"You're flying to Paris this summer, do you hear? You're flying to Paris because you've won a contest. You've won, you're going, and that's it!" he announces, pounding his desk.

The girls still have not budged. They realize, of course, this is a come-on, but most of them have never won anything in their entire lives, and it would not hurt to see just what Mr. Fields has in mind now. Knowing this particular teacher, however, they are also waiting for the other shoe to drop.

"You're going to Paris...the trip is yours...but your mother says...no, absolutely not! You're too young, too dumb, and too inexperienced to know how to take care of yourself. She thinks that without her around any guy could take advantage of you." Angry mutters abound, but Dave is approaching fever pitch and is not to be stopped, though he has to strain now for his voice to carry.

"Your mother says that if you go, some Frenchie will get you into trouble and then have you mopping floors there to support him. She also says she doesn't want you making the same mistakes she made. No! She wants you to learn from hers and remain little Miss Pure.

"O.K. If you've got the guts, you have to fight back. You have to write a letter now to persuade your mother to let you go. Tell her what the trip means to you. Tell her why you can take care of yourself, why you're not a helpless child anymore, why no man is going to turn you into a slave as soon as you are out of her sight. Of course, you could tell your mother she is right and that you'll stay home with her. . . ."

Howls of rage drown out Dave. This time he has stepped too far. Actually, his last words are just croaked, for his voice is about gone now. But no matter. The girls are already heading back for their desks. Notebooks are opened; pens are pulled out. Dave has made everything clear, the battle lines are drawn, and no questions need to be asked. It is a war every girl in class knows how to wage.

Time races as the girls are caught in a frenzy of documenting the history of their discontent. Then suddenly the bell rings.

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A gasp goes up. How can the story they want to tell be crammed into one period? Many do not give up their papers just yet. Meanwhile, students from the incoming class enter and stand around waiting for their seats. Dave himself has another class to go to. He rushes about now grabbing the papers, some having to be pulled from students' hands. Other papers get dropped in a mess all over his desk as the girls dash out. Dave stuffs the sheets into his briefcase. By now the next teacher has come in and waits with clenched jaw for the desk to be cleared. Finally on his way, Dave trudges off as the late bell rings. Once again he has that preoccupied, helpless look. Perhaps he is wondering what sort of lesson to give his next class.

Dave, of course, never prepares lesson plans. There is no time. After school he goes off to another job as editor for a publishing house. I used to wonder how he could function at either job. But despite his daily confusion, his inability to keep proper records or to get anywhere on time, Dave always comes each day with something new, an idea to excite the students and help them get a grip on things. No lesson of his is left in the classroom when his students go home. Dave sounds an alarm for them to take a stand in settling their own destinies, enforcing the notion that even if from the worst of family situations these girls are able to have a voice.

And that, I suppose, is his genius.

It has been many years since I left Eli Whitney, but Whitney has never left me. I still feel pierced by the lives of the kids I knew long ago. The tales I am going to tell now are not of my best or worst pupils, but of the ones who slipped through the cracks. They were female and black, a combination according them little privilege.

For these students in the ghettoes of New York City, the twentieth-century had not arrived. For them, comforts such as basic meals, privacy (even in the bathroom), or a night's sleep uninterrupted by drunks in the house, might not exist. For them, going to school could be an escape from that part of their lives. That is, if they got to school. Each morning of every school day a number of my students had to fly down the stairs of their tenement buildings to avoid being snatched. It is not usually a matter for the police if a girl is beaten, violated, or turned out of her home. Unfortunately, not all teachers are equipped to deal with pupils facing such problems. There are children in this city whom no one stands up for, not even to advise them that being victimized is not a part of normal growing up.

What should be the importance of a school grade to such pupils? I had my doubts until I met Clarae. She sat in my class with a hostile stare and for the first few days said nothing to anyone, including me. I was to realize this was done to curb or ignore the smirking and whispering from other girls. Clarae, you see, came to school wearing the same dress every day. Only after two weeks would she change to another one. I assumed that being poor, she lived in a home with limited closet space, and bath. It was only after Clarae has been discharged for persistent absence (she was nineteen) that her classmates regaled themselves in telling me about her.

Clarae had been evicted by her mother, who did not want her around to distract the men who came over. Thus, Clarae was farmed out to relatives, her wardrobe scattered to the homes of four aunts. She lived with one for two weeks, then moved on to the next, using the only piece of clothing allowed her in each overcrowded household.

It was amazing that Clarae concerned herself with school. I still recall the way she would frown and mutter that it was terrible how "I can't pass one test inna whole school." This, when she eventually spoke, and it was said only to me. She never wanted anyone to know how poor her grades were, and so rather than have her test paper returned with those of the rest of the class, she would ask me for the mark privately. "I want you to tell me in my ear, teacher. Only in my ear." The news for her ear was never too good.

I still wonder whether it would have made any difference to Clarae if I had passed her on one test. Perhaps it might have encouraged her, if only to let her know someone was on her side. For one test I could have fudged on the mark, as a gesture of good will. I never did. Ethics, you know. Anyway, her classmates would have found out about it soon enough. Theirs was a hard life, too, and they felt no sympathy for Clarae. They would have none for me if I had weakened to give her a break.

At least Clarae was not among those who had to sleep in hallways or abandoned cars and drag themselves to school for a free lunch. During the winter months some of these homeless would opt to keep warm by visiting their school. That is the way I would get to meet them.

A girl who street sleeps will have things stuck in her hair, dirt spots and stains over her wrinkled clothes, and a stench of breath that one meal a day cannot quell. It was my impression that Rosalyn was homeless for at least part of the time I knew her, but she was also something of a mystery. None of the other kids ever saw her outside or knew a thing about her. Sometimes she looked relatively neat, sometimes a bit disheveled, and, strange as it may seem, I never saw her in any clothes she had worn before.

If all of these were not mysterious enough, Rosalyn attended my class only on Fridays, which was when I gave a spelling test. She would come to me before the test and in a low, low voice request to see the list. About half a minute was what it took her to glance over the twenty words.

She was always the first to complete the test. And her score was always a hundred. She never needed time to check her work or change anything. Curious, I asked her once if she would read some of the words to me. She stumbled through them. But she certainly could spell them, and others like "incandescent," "rendezvous," "silhouette," or just about any words she put eyes to. She kept all her tests. I saw her take the pack out each time I returned a paper to her and insert it in order. Then with everything in place she would sit back and flip through the papers with no change of expression over her dark, solemn face. One Friday she did not show up for class, and I never saw her again. After all these years, I wonder whether Rosalyn with her photographic memory still remembers me.

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You may question my motives for doing nothing to help Rosalyn before she disappeared. My defense is one that only another teacher might understand. You see, I too was trying to survive. Yet, in my heart, I realize that such an excuse can't really separate the harried teacher from the misery around him. When the stress these youngsters face eventually forces them from school, everyone with whom the child has contact—parents, teachers, peers—seems to share in the conspiracy.

If this seems like an exaggeration, I would like you to know about Debra. Debra was a home-room pupil of mine during my first week of teaching. I took no particular notice of her until she began crying in class. She never made any sound. She came in, leaned her head down over her arms, and by the end of the period the entire desk top was dripping wet. I asked some students about this. One answered that Debra had "hay fever." The others quickly concurred. With a shrug of the shoulders I let Debra cry again the following day. By the third day I felt obligated to investigate. I asked Debra to remain after class.

"Debra, tell me what's wrong. Why have you been crying? Is there something I can do?"

She covered her eyes with her fists. "My brother and me are going to be separated...sent to foster homes."

"I see," I mumbled. But, being Debra's official class teacher, I was familiar with her personal records. "Wait, your parents aren't dead. Why must you and your brother go to foster homes?"

"My mother left us last month. Went to stay with some guy down the street. Last Saturday," Debra continued, "she came with that guy to beat up on my pop. Pop, he got beaten real bad. He inna hospital. There ain't nobody takin' care of us. So we gotta go to foster homes. My parents don't have to be dead for it."

Debra waited, curious perhaps about what I would have to say. Finally she picked up her books and left.

When Debra did not show up the next day, I assumed she had been sent to a home. I did not give the matter much thought until report-card time a few weeks later. According to regulations I was required to submit the report cards of discharged pupils to the grade adviser. Much to my surprise he would not accept the card.

"Debra was not discharged," I was told.

"But she was sent to a foster home."

"Oh, really? When?"

"I don't know. I suppose at about the time she dropped out of school."

There was a pause. The adviser regarded me and the report card I was holding. "Debra and her brother left home. Ran away. No one knows where."

I stood blinking. "Well, what should I do with this?"

He looked at the card with a smile. "Obviously I can't accept it. She only ran away, so officially she's still in your class."

"Still in my class," I muttered. "How does that help her?"

"When she's seventeen we can discharge her," he said.

"That's two years from now."

He nodded.

Back in my room I slipped the card under some papers in a desk drawer. That was thirty years ago. Debra should be middle-aged now. If she did nothing else with her life she taught me a lesson: don't play problem-solver unless you are prepared to act.

If I lived in a world in which I could have a second chance, I would shelter these children somehow. In the five years I was at Eli Whitney I was in the habit of finding notes in my desk, in my rollbook, even in my coat pockets (I had no separate facilities to hang my coat). These notes, never signed, had the same message: Take me home. Some of them might have been written by Clarae or Rosalyn or even Debra. If my conscience were greater than my fear of the law (and of losing my job), I could have done something to help those kids. I faltered instead, and they discovered that the good of this world can have a frightened heart.

I recall a news story of some years back, of a woman being tried for prostitution. Her case had to be put off for another session of court. In order to be released without bail she was required to offer proof of her address. The woman said she had nowhere to live. The judge gave the court his address and brought her home so she could have someplace to stay, and for this his Honor was soundly criticized. But I think this judge was the bravest man in the world. I should know. □

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ALL IS NOT LOST

TEACHING GENERATION X

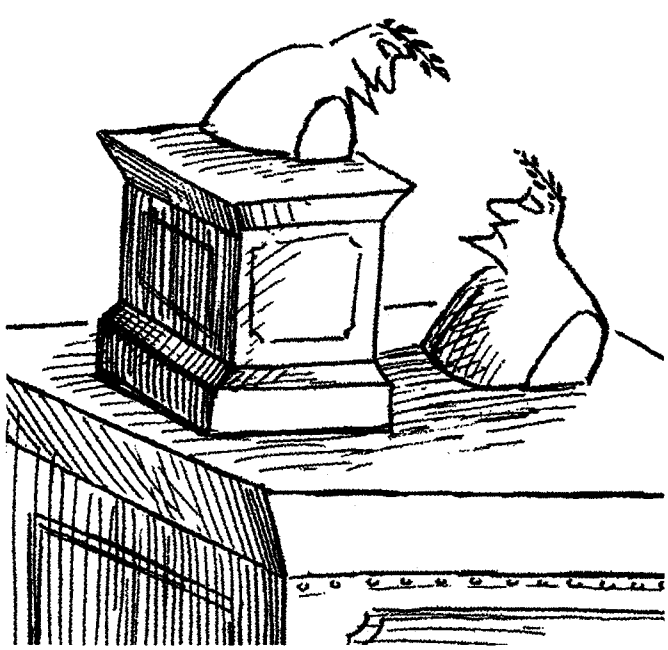
PATRICK H. McNAMARA

On my bookshelf sits a row of titles set apart. The books bombard the American university and take to task instructors like me. It's not that they are flat wrong. They simply miss a lot that goes right between professors and students today and unwittingly support those dismal "Generation X" stereotypes—bored, lost, disoriented, futureless, and so on. Our young women and men deserve better.

The first book I collected, Ernest Boyer's *College: the Undergraduate Experience* (1987), struck a mild enough tone: too few faculty are sufficiently mindful of "an obligation to give students a sense of passage toward a more coherent view of knowledge and a more integrated life." Boyer, then president of the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, had taken time to talk with students who longed for "a more coherent view of knowledge and, in quiet moments, wondered aloud whether getting a job and getting ahead would be sufficiently fulfilling." Good stuff, I thought, but the most biting was yet to come. Why, asked Boyer, are "the most deeply felt issues, the most haunting questions, the most creative moments" often relegated to the margins of university life? When and where is time taken to explore life's "ambiguities" and "imponderables"? Are ethical and moral choices "thoughtfully examined and convictions formed"?

I was still pondering Boyer's words when Alan Bloom's bombshell, *The Closing of the American Mind*, appeared the same year. American college students existed "in a condition like that of the first men in the state of nature—spiritually unclad, unconnected, isolated, with no inherited or unconditional connection with anything or anyone....preoccupied principally with themselves and with finding means to avoid permanent free fall." Specialists all, we professors pay most attention to students who major in our own fields. We have nothing to say to the undecided student, "an embarrassment to most universities," even though she "seems to be saying, 'I am a whole human being. Help me to form myself in my wholeness and let me develop my real potential.'" We shy away from these voices, lacking interest and energy; so do the institutions that employ us, unable or unwilling to reconstruct the concept of a liberally educated young man or woman. I thought about my own university's protracted struggle to fashion a core curriculum. The effort foundered when a very diverse faculty could not agree on what such an education ought to contain.

How do we get students to think for themselves, to ask their own questions and pursue the answers vigorously? The books kept coming. Historian Page Smith (*Killing the Spirit*, 1990) called the lecture method a sure way to stifle the inquiring mind, thwarting the teacher's tasks of winning "the student's confidence" and creating "an air of trust congenial to learning." The same year, philosopher Bruce Wilshire took the prize for dramatic pessimism with *The Moral Collapse of the University*. Among his powerful descriptors of today's college students: "numbness," "stasis," and "disconnectedness." Most, he thought, "did not believe that their work...would help them know what was good for them to do and to be...they had no confidence that truth about the human condition could be discovered. Either that or they felt no need to discover it." Wilshire assumes an existentialist mantle in urging instructors to "encourage self-reflection" so that students may "confront [their] own freedom and responsibility in the world."



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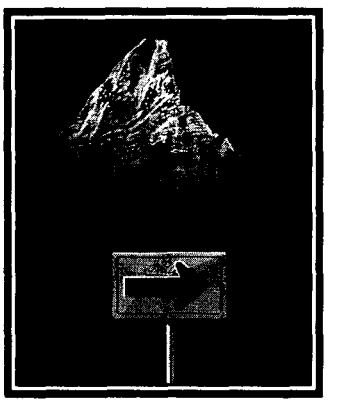
What happens when, instead of trying to move the mountain, you go around it?



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Dinesh D'Souza's *Illiberal Education* (1991) unleashed new jeremiads whose targets were "PC" and multiculturalism run amok. David Horowitz and Peter Collier even launched a monthly journal, *Heterodoxy*, to document how leftist intolerance intimidates both students and professors in the classroom, forcing apologies where none are due. Afro-American, Native American, Latino, Asian-American insistence upon respect for their distinct cultural identities threatens American wholeness, provoking Arthur Schlesinger's *The Disuniting of America* (1992). A common curriculum? Multiculturalists see it as a bad idea in the first place. Russell Jacoby's *Dogmatic Wisdom* (1994) counters by portraying settings where "women study women, African-Americans study African-Americans, Latinos study Latinos." A "new provincialism" has emerged, feeding on "a separatism that is turning prickly and hostile. At the end of multiculturalism a primitivism returns, thinking by blood, race, and sex." Heavy stuff, indeed.

And the students? In an article (the *Washington Post*, "Can We Talk?" June 26, 1994) Jacoby paints them as mute, conversationless, rarely volunteering anything. "The students have thoughts, but they're not talking....serious conversation about serious things is a rare bird." Indeed, thinks Jacoby, this student malaise reflects American culture as a whole: we make little space and time for sustained conversation, and TV doesn't help. "The electronic discussions consist of one or several people talking while millions remain quiet."

What about all this? First, I'm ready to concede that obtaining faculty consensus on a core curriculum—one that would address what Bloom calls "the permanent questions"—is virtually a lost cause. Few indeed are the state universities whose diverse faculty (ours numbers over twelve hundred) share a common cultural background allowing for fruitful dialogue on what a core curriculum ought to look like (by contrast, all faculty members of whatever specialty in the English university where I taught as an exchange professor four years ago, shared a broad knowledge of English history and culture). Like many universities, my own offers an undergraduate honors program built partially on the foundation of the Great Books. Students desiring to explore and be challenged by the classics find a home at the Honors Center, and as Bloom notes, often develop close friendships with fellow students and faculty. Honors graduates are admitted to prestigious graduate and professional schools nationwide. They are, to be sure, a priv-

Make it a habit

The object of education is the production of virtue; for virtue is that which makes a man good and his work good, too. As virtue makes a man and his work good, so also it makes him happy, for happiness is activity in accordance with virtue. As virtue makes a man good and makes him happy, so also it makes him a good citizen, and this is the aim of general or liberal education. The four cardinal virtues are justice, prudence, temperance, and fortitude, and one description of them is that they are social virtues, the virtues that good living in society requires.

The virtues are habits, and are acquired, like other habits, by doing certain acts. A man becomes just by doing just acts, temperate by being temperate, and brave by acting bravely. One cannot become good merely by listening to lectures on moral philosophy, any more than one can become a famous violin player or tennis champion by reading textbooks. The beginnings of those habits which are the moral virtues are found in the training received in childhood. It is unlikely that a college student can acquire them for the first time in college; for when he has reached that age he has already committed so many acts that his habits, good and bad, are formed.

Nevertheless, habits may be lost, corrupted, or diminished. The violin player who stops playing and the tennis champion who stops practicing will soon fall from their lofty eminence. And though the moral virtues are among the most durable of all goods, they, like other habits, may be lost, and for the same reasons. Thus an educational institution will wish to confirm and support the moral virtues of its students and modify their vices. As we have seen, instruction in how to be good is not likely to be effective. The students must act, and act in such a way as to strengthen their virtues and weaken their vices.

In this effort at some level of education, instruction in moral philosophy has a part to play. If the habits formed through training in childhood are to survive, they must be sustained by reason. All education swings around the ancient dictum that man is a rational animal. He may be trained in infancy as animals are trained. But as he becomes a man his reason must understand and approve his actions; for in the order of human powers reason rules.

It is here that we see the connection between the moral and the intellectual virtues. As the object of the moral virtues is the good, so the object of the intellectual virtues is the truth. The moral virtues depend upon prudence, which is practical wisdom. If a man is to do good actions, he must do them from choice and not from impulse or by accident. Correct choice depends on the determination of the right end and of the right means of obtaining it. Through the moral virtues our desires and appetites are perfected so that we select the proper ends.

The great and specific contribution that a college or university can make to the development of virtue is in supplying the rational basis for it, that is, in developing the

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ileged fraction of the total undergraduate student body.

Yet the absence of a coherent core à la Bloom need not spell wholesale forfeiture of the desire for wholeness or personal development among students. Let me explain. Have I encountered over my twenty-five years as a university instructor dispirited students uninspired by their courses and professors? Do universities seem to care less about the larger issues of life's meaning and about directionless students and more about ushering students into career tracks and on to majoring in something? Of course. Does campus PC get irritating? Do multicultural debates seem forever to rehash the same issues? Of course. And yes, our media-dominated culture indeed inhibits long conversations in favor of thirty-second-sound-bite opinions and invites audience passivity. University students don't walk into their classrooms immunized from these influences.

Despite the cogent critiques, I am irritated by the abstract and "distant" tone of what I read and of images of apathetic students flopped in their seats. Universities still are settings where real people vitally engage in a mutual learning process, much as they did decades ago when professors (with a little help from Hollywood) smoked pipes and conversed leisurely with students under spreading oaks and maples.

A vital process begins the opening day of class when I issue an invitation to the students in front of me. I have learned over the years to resist the almost overwhelming tendency to walk into a classroom and just start talking—you know more than they do; tell it to them. I can think of no surer way to reinforce the passivity and "audience" mentality deplored by the critics. Young Americans of college age—and that age at my university includes up to a third of my students who are age-thirty-plus "returners"—are not inherently passive. But they do await an invitation. "I welcome you to 'Youth and Society' and invite all of you to go with me on a semester-long voyage. You will be asked to read and think and write about young people, mostly younger than you—consider your brothers and sisters, daughters and sons at home—and what kind of society they live in and what could be done to make it a better society for them and for ourselves."

The class syllabus tells them we begin by contrasting the societies of Athens and Sparta. Differing conceptions of the good life and the purpose of the state yield contrasting ideals for how young people should be raised and how they should relate to adults and adult authority. Later come two-to-three-page weekend writing assignments. How would each of them define the most critical youth problems today? When I later read aloud some of the best paragraphs from those papers, I

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intellectual virtues. Wisdom, science, and understanding, the three speculative virtues, and prudence, the good habit of the practical intellect, must be the focus of a university's educational endeavor. They are the criterion of teaching and research. The text of a good course is not whether it is amusing or informational or seems to contribute to financial success, any more than the test of a good research project is whether it is expensive and elaborate and produces large literary poundage. The real test of instruction or research is whether it has high intellectual content and demands intellectual effort. Otherwise it has no place in a university, for it cannot assist in forming those habits which a university education is designed to foster.

If we turn to the production of good citizens, we see that democracy rests on the assumption that the citizens will be intelligent. This means that their education must assist them in learning how to think and get them into the habit of doing it. Their intellects must be disciplined. They must know how to read, to listen, to write, and to speak. They must have standards of judging thinking, including their own. They must know the difference between honest thinking and sophistry and between reasoning and rationalization. Only by disciplines that teach them these differences can they hope to resist the demagogue and the propagandist.

They must understand, too, the nature of man and the nature of political society, for otherwise they will not be good men or good members of a political society. They must be good and wise in respect to their own ends and in their relations with other men. If they are, they will understand that the good life can be led only in a political society, and that such a society is an organization designed to promote the common good. The common good is that condition of peace, order, and economic sufficiency which provides happiness for all to the degree to which they can participate in it. Happiness is activity in accordance with the moral and intellectual virtues, that is, good moral and intellectual habits.

The economic and social injustice of our times results from the weakness or absence of the moral and intellectual virtues, which, as we have seen, are interdependent. Economic and social injustice does not result from lack of information, lack of natural resources, or any failure of technology. We are plentifully supplied with all three. No, the principal issue of our day is a moral and intellectual one. The great problems of labor, capital, the Constitution, the judiciary, communism, fascism, war and peace revolve around fundamental questions which every student ought to face intelligently, questions affecting the ends of economic activity, of organized society, and of human life.

Yet it is possible to graduate from many colleges and universities without being compelled to face such questions and without the disciplines which would be needed to face them intelligently. Higher education must share the blame for the condition in which we find ourselves. ROBERT M. HUTCHINS

Robert M. Hutchins (1899–1977) was president of the University of Chicago. This article is excerpted from the April 22, 1938, Commonweal.

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no longer face rows of the dispirited and the passive. We are "in it" together and move on to engage assigned readings, interact with guest speakers, and sometimes break out into small discussion groups. Names are next. I have learned how community-building is my effort—successful by the fourth week or so of class—to learn students' names and to use them in class when acknowledging an upraised hand. Casual conversations before and after class are good occasions to practice names as well. (Absences become rarer when they realize you know they're missing!). Friendships often begin in these exchanged greetings.

Building a learning community is a partial response to the charge that deeper issues of life and its meaning are skirted at the university. Despite the absence of a core curriculum, I submit that virtually any subject matter in the humanities and social sciences, if taught in an "invitational" manner, will inevitably generate discussion about values, life-orientations, respect, decency, character. Student insights arise out of the way a subject is approached rather than being deliberately injected by the instructor—a sure way of turning students off ("why is she preaching at us?"). Let me add that these approaches do not translate into a "touchy-feely" style of learning. They are perfectly compatible with intellectual rigor (including readings from classic authors) reinforced by demanding examinations and tough grading. Writing assignments can be a most effective way of bringing out those deeper levels of reflectivity whose absence the Boyers, Smiths, and Wilshires deplore.

Multicultural issues need not be divisive or fraught with PC repercussions. Our student body is indeed multi-hued and multicultured, and the "Dynamics of Prejudice" course in the sociology department draws large enrollments in its sections. Opening readings probe cultural and institutionalized forms of discrimination. Students of varied racial/ethnic backgrounds (no ethnic separatism here, *pace* D'Souza and Jacoby) then form panels presenting their experiences—on the job, in the neighborhood, on the athletic field or court, in the student union building—followed by questions from class members, all taking place within a classroom climate of respectful interest often laced with humor. The simple gesture of asking students to address one another by first names can not only dissolve barriers, but in my experience, helps to encourage the mutual respect that must undergird a truly multicultural society.

The best efforts to engage students arise from cooperating kindred spirits among the faculty. "Stimulating" is a decided understatement to describe a faculty workshop I participated in a few years ago. "Critical thinking" was the buzz concept eighteen of us discussed and hammered into projected class syllabi for each of our disciplines. How would you state your desired outcomes for this course? What should the students know? How do you intend to get them there? What exercises will stimulate thinking and critical assessment of what they are learning and writing? If you have neglected women's and/or ethnic/racial issues in your courses, how do you compensate and still maintain the conceptual unity of your course—or should that unity be reconsidered? Five years later we still share classroom experiences when we run across one another on campus.

I share these reflections not in a "see what we're doing" tone but as antidote to the abstracted character of so much criticism. I've always believed that students staring impassively at the ceiling or reading the campus newspaper in class say much more about us as instructors than about the students. Intellectual curiosity has not vanished from our students nor are twenty-plus-year-olds lost wanderers without futures. Our culture does, however, force us more than ever, if we care about teaching, to invite young men and women into learning partnerships where issues are read about, critically discussed, and written about. The TV sound bites, students come to realize, are indeed impoverished ways of understanding complex matters that will continue to impact their lives. There is simply no substitute for the sustained conversations that universities, at their best, make possible. Such conversations, carried with them after commencement, offer the best hope that our young (and not-so-young) women and men will indeed confront their freedom and responsibility and, as thoughtful citizens, belie the pessimistic assessments of them. □

Geraldine C. Little

First Time

Taste it, my friend urged.
How we resist the unknown.
Now. I was nudged
into dipping a silver fork
into garlic-pungent butter
melted to golden pond,
and thrusting into my still
recalcitrant mouth the morsel
that made me think,
shudderingly at first,
then stunningly, of gardens
lush with seed
sunlight and shadows, myself
in a chair with a book,
half dreaming. I swallowed
vision and snail, rejoicing
at creation, all its slimy
stinking marvels, and the sprite
which scampers somewhere
behind the ribcage, named,
yea verily, *Courage*.

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NIHILISM ON HORSEBACK

PECKINPAH'S 'BUNCH' RETURNS

Somewhere in the fiction of Norman Mailer occurs the sentence, "They knew the hilarity of men for whom things had ended in utter disaster." That describes, to perfection, *The Wild Bunch*. There is scarcely a minute of this two-and-a-half-hour movie that isn't informed by a sense that the world is being smashed to smithereens, and the only thing you can do about it is try to do most of the smashing yourself—with gusto. Director Sam Peckinpah's movie is a berserker song of rage in pursuit of death.

The film came out in 1969, when many things in our country seemed to be smashing up, and it affected young moviegoers in a peculiar way. At a time when scarcely any American movies dealt directly with the Vietnam War, *The Wild Bunch* was taken as an analogue of the war, a nightmarish vision of American might devastating the lives of third-world countries.

When I was an adolescent seeing the movie for the first time, the Vietnam interpretations didn't quite work for me, and now, viewing the uncut version (long available as a video but only recently being shown in theaters), I find the theory utterly preposterous. For *The Wild Bunch*, at its best, is apolitical or even prepolitical in the way violent children are. This movie is about the death instinct manifesting itself in middle-aged criminals who have knocked themselves out, and the outlaws, of course, are neither imperialistic nor ideological. They end up in Mexico because Mexico just happens to be there as they flee south from their pursuers. When Jaime Sanchez as Angel, the one Mexican outlaw in the gang, starts hymning the beauties of his country as the gang approaches the border, the American Lyle (Warren Oates) just shrugs his shoulders and says that it looks like another piece of Texas to him. Exactly. If the Bunch had to flee north, they would have been content to perpetrate mayhem in Minnesota. Later in the movie, the outlaws do give support to some insurgents who are trying to overthrow a tyrant, but, as we shall see, when Sam Peckinpah tries to inject a note of lefty hopefulness into his work, his film rings false. Peckinpah was never comfortable with man as political animal because his true bent was for portraying humans as strictly animal, or at least Peckinpah's idea of an animal: not innocent or fecklessly graceful but predatory, hungry, bewildered, eternally pernicious.

That vision is realized at once, before the movie is thirty seconds old. The gang, headed by Pike Bishop (William Holden), is riding into a Texas town to rob a bank and, on the way in, passes a group of children huddled in a circle as they play at something. Marbles? Actually, they're torturing two scorpions by stirring hoards of angry red ants over the poisonous arachnids. Soon they set all the animals ablaze.

The Bunch goes to work robbing the bank at the center of town while the kids, on the outskirts, are doubtlessly finding something else to torture. Meanwhile, their parents are having a revival meeting. Literally situated between sadistic imps and homicidal outlaws, how appallingly naive, how blunderingly innocent these nice, middle-class folk look! And soon, marching to the strains of "Bringing in the Sheaves," they are headed right between the escaping robbers and the concealed bounty hunters hired by the railroad. It is the townspeople mostly who get slaughtered in the crossfire, a scene that, with its intricate choreography of random slaughter, still shocks.

Shocks, but doesn't arouse much pity. Peckinpah has been compared to the Eisenstein who made the Odessa steps massacre sequence in *Battleship Potemkin*. But, if you've ever seen that silent classic, you remember and pity the lady whose pince-nez is shattered by a cossack's bullet, the appalled student shouting his horror, the dying mother whose collapse propels the baby carriage on its famous descent. These

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Covenantal Life: Church	*O'Shea*
Life Cycle II	*Higgins*
Imagination: Ministry and Youth Education	*Scott*

SESSION II: (MTWTH) July 10-25, 9:30 A.M.--12:20 P.M.

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victims aren't so much characters as images of outrage, yet they are apparitions which move us to mourn. The slaughter that opens *The Wild Bunch* is very different. A woman dragged by a panicked horse is for Peckinpah just so much crinoline whipped along in the dust; the men are animate department-store mannequins who miraculously spurt blood.

So, is there no humanity in this movie? There is, but where we find it shocks us just as much as it did in 1969, shocks us more than the bloodletting which has long since been outdone in sheer goriness by *The Terminator* and *Die Hard* and *Natural Born Killers*.

For the only fully realized humanity that Peckinpah gives us is the humanity of his killers. The sere strength of Holden's Pike, the bawdiness and foul-mouthed loyalty of Ernest Borgnine's Dutch (best performance of his career), the tormented doggedness of Robert Ryan's Thornton, Strother Martin's whinnying viciousness, Jaime Sanchez's macho pride, Warren Oates's dim-witted resentfulness, and—most intimidating of all—the power-mad, whisky-soaked horror of Mapache as played (or maybe just embodied) by the legendary Mexican director-actor (and convicted criminal) Emilio Fernandez—all these characters haunt our memories long after the movie is over. Peckinpah's affection for them is almost palpable and is often most apparent at the most unexpected moments. For instance, just after Pike shows some rebellious followers just who's boss, he's unceremoniously dumped into the dirt by an uncinched saddle. Dragging his aging body back onto his horse and retaking the lead position amid muttered taunts, he gets a look of pure love from his second-in-command, Dutch, and in the look you can sense Peckinpah's love for his character.

It's a love devoid of sentimentality. Just when you're beginning to feel their pain, Peckinpah reminds you that these men are pain-inflicting barbarians. Dutch, fired upon by Mexican soldiers, grabs a prostitute and uses her body, not as a bargaining chip to stop the shooting but simply as a buffer to take the bullets meant for him. Riddled with shot, her rag-doll corpse is hideously flung aside. And Dutch is the nearest you get to lovable in *The Wild Bunch*! No, Peckinpah's sympathy for his criminal heroes isn't a product of self-deception.

Not so his feeling for the virtuous Mexican villagers who seek to overthrow Mapache. They are all in the tradition of John Steinbeck's *The Pearl*: statuesque in their stoic nobility, full of folk music and earthy wisdom. (There's a village elder on hand spouting plenty of the last.) When the outlaws ride out of the village after doing it no particular kindness (the gift of contraband rifles comes much later), its inhabitants line up on either side of the road to say a farewell so full of veneration that Christ and the Twelve Apostles would find it embarrassing.

Peckinpah even uses the villagers to flee momentarily from his own nihilism. Before he became a director, Peckinpah was strongly affected by Kurasawa's marvelous *Seven Samurai*. That film concerned warriors who aid peasants against brigands. Peckinpah sought to create a similar action in *The Wild Bunch* by having his desperadoes smuggle a case of rifles to the insurgent villagers. But what a difference! Kurasawa fully dramatized the interaction of warriors and peasants and even created a fifteen-minute coda in which the samurai witness just what they've achieved with their martial arts: the return of the broad rhythms and changelessness of peasant life. But in *The Wild Bunch* the Mexican peasantry is merely employed to give the anti-heroes a chance to do something civic.

However, the powerful climax of *The Wild Bunch* is pure nihilism. Trapped in Mapache's stronghold by the bounty hunters and unable to save Angel from the Generalissimo's tortures, Pike Bishop has spent the night with a prostitute who dandles her baby while Bishop is dressing in the morning. Tormented by the memory of friends and lovers betrayed and physically weary, Pike wistfully contemplates the mother and child and seems to long for such domesticity in his own life. Then he hears his two most abject followers, Lyle and Tector, bickering with a prostitute in the next room because she won't service them both for the price of one. Disgust suffuses Holden's face (Holden is really superb at this moment) and he buckles on his weapons. He walks in on the argument. "Let's go." Lyle, stupid though he is, instantly understands and responds, "Why not?" Tector and Dutch are gathered and what is left of the wild bunch marches to confront Mapache. Not to rescue Angel, for that is clearly impossible. They're marching, consciously, willingly, joyfully, to death. The following massacre, however overwhelming, is nothing but the inevitable conclusion to the quiet decision made by Pike to get out of the world.

The Wild Bunch is powerfully made, vivid, unforgettable. But "the greatest American film ever made"? That's what the *New Yorker* says in is capsule review in the "Goings on about Town" section, and several critics haven't been far behind in their praise. Greater than *Citizen Kane*? Than *City Lights*? *The Godfather*? *Greed*? *Intolerance*? Better than the best work of John Huston or Stanley Kubrick? Really? I'm afraid that some terrible chickens are coming home to roost in the cultural precincts of our country. The era of kneejerk acceptance of nihilism as the most honest honesty of them all arrived with Hemingway and shows no sign of departing. Death-embracing Sam Peckinpah takes his place as one of its heroes.

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Nineteenth-century type or nut?

THE KINGDOM OF MATTHIAS
A Story of Sex and Salvation in Nineteenth-Century America
Paul E. Johnson and Sean Wilentz
Oxford University Press, $25, 225 pp.

Andrew Delbanco

In 1831, Nathaniel Hawthorne published a short story, "My Kinsman, Major Molineux," about a country youth named Robin who arrives in a seaport town (presumably Boston) in search of a cousin who has "manifested much interest" in him, "and thrown out hints respecting [his] future establishment...in life." A walking symbol of callowness, Robin dresses in yarn and leather clothes that have been spun and stitched by his "mother or a sister," and wears his father's three-cornered hat—an emblem of his nostalgic attachment to the paternal world he has left behind. As a younger son, he has been excluded from inheriting his father's farm, and is looking to his kinsman for rescue.

In the city, Robin misreads every sign and solicitation. He mistakes a prostitute for a maiden, and contemptuous strangers for friends. By the end of the story, Hawthorne leaves him poised on the verge of retreating to the safety of the country from which he came. But the tale ends uncertainly, with an implicit question: will he remain and adapt, or will he turn and flee?

Set in the years when Hawthorne was writing about the psychic costs of the passing of the old rural order, *The Kingdom of Matthias* can be read as a sequel to "My Kinsman, Major Molineux"—a version of what might have happened to Robin if he had stayed in town. It tells the story of a bizarre religious cult founded by "poor men who were rooted socially and emotionally in the yeoman republic of the eighteenth century" who find themselves in New York City in the 1820s (forced there, like many of their contemporaries, by economic necessity), trying to adapt to a culture committed to "risk-taking, individual ambition, and the accumulation of money."

The dislocated figure upon whom Paul Johnson and Sean Wilentz focus is the cult-leader, Robert Matthews, an emigrant from upstate who had been raised in the last decade of the eighteenth century in an orthodox Scots Presbyterian church, where he learned "to live in an anxious world, where humankind was innately corrupt and where the thunderclaps of the Hudson Valley sprang from the mouth of the Lord." Apprenticed to a carpenter in rural Washington County, he turned up in Manhattan at the age of twenty, where he began to compile a criminal record as a woman-beater. After returning north, he married, and took up a sedate life as keeper of a drygoods store—interrupted by occasional trips to the New York wholesalers, and by "seizures of intense peevishness."

Matthews profited by the economic boom that followed the War of 1812, but then, overextended, fell victim to the contraction of credit that succeeded the good times. He "had no choice," Johnson and Wilentz explain, "but to take his family back to Manhattan and to start all over again as a carpenter," but in the city his troubles mounted: family illness, long

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spells of unemployment as construction jobs dried up in the recurrent financial panics. Chronicling the explosive moods that now possessed him, Johnson and Wilentz tell the story of Matthews's descent into madness. It took the particular form of religious fanaticism characterized by a compulsion to emulate the Old Testament Jews, complete with dietary laws and patriarchal costume: "black cap of japanned leather shaped like an inverted cone; a military frock coat...decorated with gold braid, frogs, and fancy buttons," as well as a sword and iron rod "with which he would rule the world."

In Matthews's prophecies, Johnson and Wilentz discern a wishful vision of a world in which "there would be no market, no money, no buying or selling, no wage system with its insidious domination of one father over another, no economic oppression of any kind." It was a purified world of plain living, from which puddings and pies and other womanish contrivances were banished. And though women themselves would not be expelled, "Every thing that has the smell of women," as Matthews put it, "will be destroyed," and only "real men will be saved; all mock men will be damned."

By the 1830s, Matthews had attracted a flock of followers—some of them obviously demented—and, having renamed himself Matthias, he roamed with them between New York and Albany and the village of Sing Sing on the Hudson. He seems to have had a particular attraction for other psychologically wounded men, and for needy women; one married woman, whom he elevated to a sort of queenship, declared that in her experience it was he alone who could "enter the most Holy of Holies," and "penetrate to the Sanctum Sanctorum." After presiding at the dinner table like Alan Bates in the asylum in *King of Hearts*, Matthias was evidently given to inviting some new woman to find out if she might be his true "match spirit."

The whole sordid story began to wind down as sexual competition within Matthias's "kingdom" turned alliances into rivalries. After the death of one of his chief disciples (whom some contemporaries suspected Matthias of having poisoned), the cult broke up into bitter factions. One group brought charges against the prophet for embezzlement, while another pressed for a murder indictment. By the time Matthias came to trial, he faced an assortment of accusations. The trial itself seems to have been something of a circus, and, due to the efforts of his competent lawyer, Matthias was acquitted of the main charges. Convicted on one assault charge (despite the fact that his victim, his own daughter, had withdrawn the complaint), he served four months in jail—three for the assault and one for contempt of court.

After his imprisonment, Matthias headed west and into obscurity. He showed up briefly at a Mormon settlement in Ohio, where he held forth on theological matters to Joseph Smith himself, who judged that the strange visitor's "mind

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was evidently filled with darkness." His public career was over.

Like all well-told accounts of human disintegration, this story has a certain pathos. But it also has a degree of absurdity that elicits from the authors an occasional unsuppressed snicker. Johnson and Wilentz seem drawn to it not so much for its exposure of their man's vulnerability, as for his value in making an historical point. In their view, Matthews was insane, but nevertheless somehow representative—a man who had found a way to "reassert a swaggering, authoritarian, and resolutely antibourgeois way of being a man," who had "revived the rural ways he had known in his youth and endowed them with new prophetic meanings."

Referring to Jim Jones and David Koresh (obligatory names these days in any book about religious crackpots from the American past), Johnson and Wilentz contend that "repeatedly, Americans caught in bewildering times have made sense of things primarily with reference to alterations in sexual and family norms, and a perceived widespread sexual disorder." This is a fair argument—about our time as well as about the antebellum years—but the lunatic Robert Matthews seems a pretty thin foundation upon which to base it. When a small story is used to make a big point, there is risk of disproportion.

The Kingdom of Matthias insists on the significance of the obscure materials it has uncovered, speculating at one point that Herman Melville's father (also a failed retail merchant who moved between New York and Albany) might have known the Matthias story, or even some of its principals; and that Matthias might have had something to do with Whitman's interest in "metropolitan crime." And though "the story of Matthias went largely ignored by later generations, the penny-press journalism it helped to inspire had an impact on American life and literature that, according to one aficionado, Edgar Allan Poe, was 'probably beyond all calculation.'" There is some slippage in that sentence—in which the relations among the penny press, Matthias, and Poe get lost in the syntax.

But the larger problem with *The Kingdom of Matthias* is that its grand theme—that misogyny and reactionary nostalgia are built into the psychological structure of modernity as male responses to the emasculating experiences of domesticity and wage labor—tends to obscure the mundane fact that to his contemporaries, Matthias was a contemptible grotesque. Americans may have "sensed that the Matthias cult spoke with strange eloquence to the social and emotional upheavals in which they lived their own lives," but they did not express that sense, at least not in ways that can be recovered. Johnson and Wilentz work hard to articulate it retrospectively on their behalf, because they believe that the story of Matthias speaks "not to some quirk of the moment or some disguised criminal intention," which is what contemporary commentators seemed to think, "but to persistent American hurts and rages wrapped in longings for a supposedly bygone holy patriarchy." *The Kingdom of Matthias* is a good story well told; but as an attempt at historical allegory in which large psychic pain is writ small, it is a stretch. □

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ACTING PRESIDENTIAL

STATECRAFT AND STAGECRAFT
American Political Life in the Age of Personality
Robert Schmuhl
University of Notre Dame Press, $9.95, 113 pp.

DEMANDING DEMOCRACY
Robert Schmuhl
University of Notre Dame Press, $10.95, 149 pp.

SCRAMBLING FOR PROTECTION
The New Media and the First Amendment
Patrick M. Garry
University of Pittsburgh Press, $29.95, 198 pp.

Timothy A. Byrnes

In 1990, Robert Schmuhl, a professor of American Studies at Notre Dame, published the concise and lively *Statecraft and Stagecraft: American Political Life in the Age of Personality*. In that book, Schmuhl argued that the "lines between statecraft and stagecraft have faded to the point that the two now blur together." The decline of national political parties, the demise of "smoke-filled rooms," and the rise of television as the central medium of political communication all resulted in powerful "linkages between public policy and public performance." Ronald Reagan, our actor-president and master of stagecraft, was the logical product of these developments, rather than their cause.

Roaming broadly over the scholarly literature in political science and mass communications, Schmuhl contributed substantially to our understanding of the contemporary American political system. For better or worse, he argued, politics had adopted the techniques and values of show business. And the task for the modern citizen was to find ways to participate in the production rather than to serve as a passive audience for it.

Robert Schmuhl has now returned to the same subject in *Demanding Democracy*, but he has found that the script and style of the political show have changed substantially. More specifically, the candidates in the 1992 presidential campaign reformulated their stagecraft to respond to the demands of an engaged and demanding public. In place of the carefully staged spectacle and mud slinging of 1988, the candidates held town meetings, answered phone calls on the "Today" show, bantered with Larry King, debated questions posed by ordinary citizens, and broadcast thirty-minute infomercials. It was still stagecraft and public performance (recall Clinton's shades and sax on "Arsenio Hall"), but in comparison to the recent past much of it was both relatively substantive and basically independent of the old stage managers, the news divisions at the three major networks. The public demanded more democracy and dialogue, Schmuhl argues, and the candidates responded with variants of audience-participation stagecraft.

Schmuhl is a clear and persuasive writer, and he brings to his subject the erudition and breadth of a generalist. But one pitfall of his approach (and, by the way, of the kind of interdisciplinary scholarship he represents) is that erudition can at times give way to banality. Fully half of *Demanding Democracy*, for example, is devoted to an account of the 1992 campaign that very rarely delves any deeper than the contemporary accounts offered in the weekly newsmagazines. Schmuhl is much more insightful when he turns from description of the changes manifested in 1992 to his analysis of what these changes mean for the future of American democracy.

For Schmuhl the more direct communication between candidate and voter during the 1992 campaign is closely related to the explosion in the number of media outlets and even the variety of modes of mass communication that is currently taking place. Limitless interactive TV, narrowcasting market strategies, computer bulletin boards, 900 numbers, talk radio, and who knows what else in the coming decades offer both tremendous opportunities and daunting challenges not only for political stagecraft, but more importantly for the quality of national statecraft. As America becomes ever more racially and ethnically diverse, Schmuhl argues, we must endeavor to use the new media not to fracture an already disjointed polity, but rather to inform and mobilize a public that is hungry for community and for meaningful public dialogue.

The enormous dimensions of that challenge are reinforced by Patrick M. Garry's examination of these same phenomena in *Scrambling for Protection: The New Media and the First Amendment*. While Schmuhl is concerned primarily with the political ramifications of technological change, Garry turns his attention to the important legal questions involved. What, Garry asks, is a reasonable definition of "the press" as we head into the twenty-first cen-

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"I'm certainly not going to recognize the age of the computer!"

tury? Is *Commonweal*, for example, functionally different, and therefore legally and constitutionally distinct, from a computer bulletin board posted on the Internet? Is electronic mail personal communication only or is it, in some of its manifestations, pretty similar to a daily newspaper? What is the difference, if any, between the national TV networks and a local public-access channel sent out to cable subscribers? Providing satisfactory answers to these questions, Garry argues, is a necessary prerequisite to applying the First Amendment to the actual circumstances of modern public communication.

Garry believes not only that these new media are legitimate elements of the press, he also believes that the bulletin boards, list services, and 900 numbers of today are much closer to the type of participatory and opinion-based press of the eighteenth century that the First Amendment was designed to protect, than are the monopolistic corporations that control daily newspapers and network television today. Garry wants constitutional protections extended to these media because he believes history requires it and because he believes the future of American participatory democracy depends on it.

One does not have to share all of Garry's sometimes romanticized notions of the value of the new media (in fact, such romance is hard to sustain after an hour or so of reading some of the participatory, opinion-based dialogue found on the Internet) to recognize the importance of the questions and challenges he poses in his book. Using the same computer terminal on which I composed this review I can read hundreds of magazines, receive electronic mail, participate in national and international bulletin boards on almost any topic imaginable, and receive daily or weekly news analyses from any number of independent information sources. The computer revolution is at long last reaching down to the individual, day-to-day level, and it is bringing with it political and legal controversies of the first order. What legal protections do these processes deserve? Will they draw people into the political process by giving them a greater sense of efficacy and participation or drive people away through overload, fragmentation, and expense? Neither Robert Schmuhl nor Patrick M. Garry has definitive answers to these questions and others like them. But they have both provided a public service by offering early and, on the whole, insightful analyses of the radical change that technological advances are bringing to democracy, statecraft, and American civil liberties. □

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SUMMER 1995

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THE COSMOS: ALPHA TO OMEGA

THE ORIGIN OF THE UNIVERSE
John D. Barrow
Basic Books, $20, 150 pp.

THE LAST THREE MINUTES
Conjectures about the Fate of the Universe
Paul Davies
Basic Books, $20, 162 pp.

Nancy M. Haegel

Cosmos's Missing Mass: Wispy Particle Weighs In." "Hubble Space Telescope Photographs a Black Hole." "Astronomers Debate Conflicting Answers for the Age of the Universe." The newspapers recently have reminded us with striking regularity that science is not as gridlocked as politics. First there was the Cosmic Background Explorer (COBE) satellite and its discovery of the long-sought variations in the cosmic background radiation. Then results from the optically improved Hubble telescope began filtering in and, most recently, a report that part of the "missing mass" that has puzzled astronomers may be accounted for by particles known as neutrinos.

Among cosmological questions, at least one really big one still remains. How and when will it all end? Will the universe expand forever, heading into an infinity of cold darkness, or will it regather itself into a fiery last crunch, a time reversal of its explosive start? Will the Democrats and Republicans agree on the budget before it happens?

Budget issues aside, two recent books survey the science of the universe, cradle to grave. *The Origin of the Universe*, by University of Sussex professor John Barrow, and *The Last Three Minutes*, by scientist and Templeton Prize winner Paul Davies, are the second and third volumes in The Science Masters Series, a new and growing collection of short, entertaining, and accessible-without-being-simplistic treatises by internationally known scientists. Barrow and Davies were preceded by Richard Leaky (*The Origins of Humankind*) and will be followed by such notables as Stephen Jay Gould, Marvin Minsky, and Mary Catherine Bateson. In these books, one encounters the most intriguing scientific ideas and questions, speculations that all too rarely appeared in the science courses we took in school.

The best science often comes from asking the most basic questions. One learns in chemistry and physics that the charge on the electron is 1.6×10^{-19} coulombs. The world's leading scientists ask "Why?" There are planets and stars and galaxies. How did they come to be? Students study the Big Bang and learn that the universe is expanding. Cosmologists ask if the expansion will go on forever. In these cases, the questions of the experts really do translate easily into the vernacular.

Barrow describes his own book as "the Beginning for beginners." The birth of the universe can be divided into three stages: 0 to 1 second, a period in which temperatures exceeded anything known on earth and not even hydrogen atoms were stable; 1 to 1,000 seconds, when light elements formed; and the time from 1,000 seconds on. After 1,000 seconds (less than the time required to read this review), "it's all over." That doesn't mean that the formation of stars and galaxies isn't interesting, just that terrestrial physics seems to explain most of what we know about how it happened. This isn't true, however, of the earliest times. Barrow refers to the first second as the "cosmic watershed" and much of the book is focused on that very short, but infinitely interesting period after the Big Bang.

It's a fascinating story, told with a wealth of analogy and a minimum of equations (other than the famous $E=mc^2$, I counted only one, and that one, as fate would have it, has a typographical error!). Little or no science background required. What will help is some familiarity with, or at least a willingness to pause and think about numbers, large and small.

Consider, for example, a time when the universe is 10^{-43} seconds old. (Remember, 10^{-43} is 0.000.....1, with 42 zeros before the one. Since no *Commonweal* editor would tolerate that many zeros, we write 10^{-43}.) 10^{-43} s is called the Planck time, a time at which the entire universe was so small that it was subject to quantum uncertainty. To describe this incredibly early time in the universe, we need new physical models and new theories, like Stephen Hawking's idea that "time becomes another dimension of space." It gets hard for science writers, too, as analogies fail. And yet, as Barrow says, that might be good, "a sign that we are touching upon some brute fact of reality rather than just redeploying our old familiar concepts."

Origin and destiny are often connected, in life as well as cosmology. So it is a short hop from Barrow's book to Davies's "doomsday" reflections. Davies begins by considering a comet impact on the earth, similar to Jupiter's experience last summer. Will this happen? Probably. It has happened before. Anytime soon? Not likely. The vast emptiness of space means that

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cosmic collisions are relatively rare. But the possibility reminds us that, even given our best effort to preserve the environment and ourselves, the universe ultimately has other things in mind. Whether by slow decay or violent collapse, the expanding universe portends change.

The question of the ultimate fate of the universe has occupied scientists long before Einstein revolutionized our ways of thinking about time and space. Helmholtz in 1856 wrote of the "heat death of the universe," extending the second law of thermodynamics to questions of cosmology. This idea has affected the thinking of many philosophers since. What is the point, if it's all headed for maximum disorder and decay anyway? But Davies paints a variety of other pictures, in which humans, or perhaps more accurately some other form of conscious beings, play a less passive role as their universe moves inexorably on its path to the future.

Of one thing there is no doubt: the earth will be a victim of the death of the sun. Based on its size, the sun should become a red giant, expanding to approximately 500 times its current size and engulfing the earth in flames. Before this fiery end, the atmospheres and oceans will be gone and presumably life as well. This won't occur for more than a billion years. But whatever the ultimate fate of the universe as a whole, our descendants will have to be elsewhere if they hope to watch.

This is where Davies takes the reader on flights of dizzying imagination and speculation, and the unsuspecting reader must beware as he crosses back and forth between fact and fantasy. Societies, writes Davies, may get their energy from black holes, send fertilized ova out to colonize other worlds, and manipulate galaxies as well as the human species in an attempt to survive in an increasingly inhospitable universe. There is, Davies writes, "no reason why these colonists should be human in appearance or even in mentality. If beings can be engineered to meet various needs, then each expedition could involve purpose-designed entities with the necessary anatomy and psychology for the job." Science fiction now, but a billion years is a long time.

When we think hard enough about the beginning and the end of the universe, the how and the why questions start to overlap. It is in these realms that science and theology most readily intersect. Whichever way one's reading taste normally tends, these books are a worthy addition to the list. □

REVIEWERS

ANDREW DELBANCO *teaches English at Columbia University. His new book,* The Death of Satan: How Americans Have Lost the Sense of Evil, *will be published in the fall by Farrar, Straus & Giroux.*

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THE CESSPOOL RUNS AMOK

GHOSTS OF MANILA
James Hamilton-Paterson
Farrar, Straus & Giroux, $22, 279 pp.

Edward T. Wheeler

This is not a novel the Philippine Tourist Office would look kindly upon. True to its title, the book leaves spirits walking abroad, a sort of haunting moral, the more eerie because of its irresolution and the more lasting because of Hamilton-Paterson's powers of language. Not many ghosts, we gather, are laid to rest in Manila—or in this fiction.

Hamilton-Paterson, a British novelist and naturalist justly acclaimed for the beauty of his prose, won the Whitbread Prize for Best First Novel in 1989 for *Gerontius*. His *Playing with Water: Passion and Solitude on a Philippine Island* (1989), *The Great Deep: The Sea and Its Threshold* (1992), and his residence in both the Philippines and Italy suggest he has been thinking deeply on the relationship of East to West. *Ghosts of Manila* embodies those thoughts.

From the first page, the author warns us that this is not an adventure story, although by the midpoint enough plotting has been done to make the book head toward a climax. Plot indeed we have in the end, and fiery revelations, but the real sense of its structure is not so much collage as superimposition: a series of moving frames or stories running simultaneously, with an ominous center point to hold them. The first seventy pages shuttle us from an atmospheric prose poem on Manila's choking smog to a nasty little factory scene in which bodies of criminals are "salvaged" to make skeletons; a series of cuts then introduces four different stories, one involving a local police inspector, another a young, beautiful English archaeologist, the third a barrio matriarch, and finally a middle-aged English filmmaker who provides, if any character does, a narrative anchor in the tale. Each of the principals in these stories faces ghosts, spirits from the past calling if not for vengeance then for recognition. The four tales find an ironically appropriate center-point in the cesspool that Nanang Pipa, the barrio matriarch, orders dug and which, of course, releases another ghost. From this slowly spinning wheel we slide off with little sense of finality, but an extraordinary sense of life in the Philippines and of Hamilton-Paterson's art.

The novel inhabits the borderland territory so well traveled by Graham Greene—there is an intriguing tip of the hat to the old master late on in the novel. But there is also a bluntness of language in the characterization and description of violence alien to Greene. Hamilton-Paterson does many things well—his use of metaphor is particularly effective—but at times he deliberately impersonates tabloid journalists: *Manila* is the stuff *National Enquirer* vampires are made of. This is not a travel book, but to those of us whose sense of the Philippines stops with Imelda Marcos's collection of shoes and Cory Aquino's yellow ribbons the novel offers revelations. The four stories pair the perspectives of European visitors facing themselves in the exotic East with those of the locals who live out the violent contradictions of an Asian nation so corruptly Westernized.

The novel wears its considerable learning lightly, offering us archaeological snippets of ancient Chinese settlement and trade, the mad history of Imelda Marcos's "edifice complex," the seedy and violent underworld of Manila, and accounts of savage antiterrorist conflicts "in the South." But it is the character John Prideaux, the filmmaker turned anthropologist, in his investigation into *amok*, the strange and deadly phenomenon of a person's loss of control under stress, who allows a focus of sorts. How indeed do we

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make sense of the public and political life in the Philippines, "high baroque in its magnificent daring," which spawns so many ghosts in its violently unjust operations? How do we, how does anyone avoid going *amok*?

Prideaux cannot ultimately understand the culture his anthropological designs demand he describe: the irreconcilable testimony he gathers from so many witnesses is, in a sense, the answer which Hamilton-Paterson offers us to the questions he raises about the Philippines. Prideaux comes to face himself, his own ghosts in the form of failed marriage and career, but the spirits, embodied or disembodied, of the many Filipinos he comes to know remain undiscerned, left in a world that the novelist appears to render paradigmatic—as if Manila might be what we are increasingly in New York or London. A renegade priest, Father Herrera, lashes out at Prideaux as he sifts the dregs of San Clemente, the execrable barrio which is the site for the novel's climactic scene:

> The truly good couldn't care less about being rewarded because living well is the best revenge, but they wouldn't mind the truly bad paid back. Why? Not for their own self-righteous pleasure, but because if they aren't, the word "justice" loses all meaning and we may as well all go back to the jungle and stop pretending to be civilized creatures with souls.

The ambiguous Herrera opens a question fundamental to the novel, the justifying of the ways of God to men, or in this setting, the ways of people to people if there is a God. The spectral call for social justice, for some sort of response not so much to the hand of God or to fate but to "the hand of man which beats you to a pulp" is the preoccupation of his book. The same priest's self-sacrificial and fatal efforts to save the poor children of his flock from their burning shanty seems to commend him for his own "living well" until we find that he is no priest, indeed, is the real priest's lover. So the uncoiling of discernment winds a bit serpentine even as the climactic act of retributive justice plays out: a slum dweller goes *amok* and bulldozes the burning San Clemente, revealing guilty secrets and raising ghosts.

The denseness of *Ghosts of Manila*, the graininess of its details, its side ventures into back alleys, into a senator's country palace, and even into impossibly normal middle-class life, flesh out the more ghostly concerns. *Manila* lives in dialogue, incident, and in the self-discoveries of each of the principals. Although he can give no Day of Judgment to restore order, Hamilton-Paterson works a form of closure in Prideaux's airplane trip back to England: he has dismissed his research ironically as *Determined Mistranslation: Myth of Intercultural Understanding and the Fiction of Interpersonal Communication* and flies into occidental skies framing a prayer on behalf of the ghosts, a summons to remember the "scattered fragments of an immense collective love which once sparkled and gleamed and never quite focused itself." Where these fail, the novelist's invention hauntingly succeeds. □

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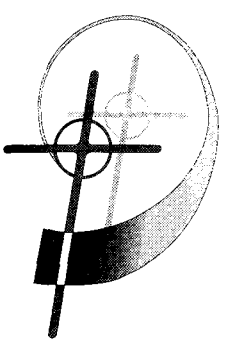

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CORRESPONDENCE

(Continued from page 2)

'Them' vs. 'us'

Chicago, Ill.

To the Editors: I do not want to be misunderstood: Capital punishment is barbaric. But Bill Youkey's report [February 10] on an execution during his three years in Saudi Arabia (years that "seemed like a lifetime") cannot pass without comment. It can only be described as a breathtaking illustration of what Edward Said calls "Orientalism"—discourse that divides the world's people into a "them" and an "us," where "they" are ultimately inferior.

Youkey sees Saudis as "frenzied," a "raucous rabble" filled with a "frightening...zeal." He hopes Islam is not "a religion of bloodthirsty curiosity seekers" sustained by "the religious police" and subject to the "total" authority of the king. But it sure looks like that to him. Ultimately, he doubts the sincerity of the believers' faith, referring to the "truly pious or overly curious"—he's not sure which—as cowering "at the feet of their Saudi masters."

How will we ever progress toward understanding our common humanity if a Catholic magazine perpetuates such views?

WALTER J. KENDALL III

The writer is a professor of law at the John Marshall Law School in Chicago.

The author replies:

Professor Kendall's letter is both insightful and inciteful.

He captures the essence of what I was conveying, that the Saudi culture (more than that of any other Sunni Muslim people) is oxymoronical to anything we Westerners have ever known. I believe (and I am not alone in this belief) that we will, in fact, never "progress toward understanding our common humanity" because of customs like beheadings, like stoning a drowning woman as punishment, like not allowing women to drive, to work, or to show their faces in public, and like not allowing men and women to hold hands in

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public or to be together in the same car.

Although Professor Kendall grasps the substance of my words, he misrepresents the spirit of my feelings. I used "frenzied" to describe the third country national (TCN) population, not the Saudis. It would take another article to describe the desperate situation of TCNs in Riyadh. They are treated like rabble, worse than nineteenth-century Southern slaves, and they respond accordingly. It is important to understand this distinction, for it shows two forms of Islam. In the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia it results in a "them" and an "us," and nothing Bill Youkey can say will change that. BILL YOUKEY

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Study? Here? This is a dorm!

T.P. MacGLOIN

I entered Trinity College, Dublin, in 1951, taking up rooms first in the lesser quad of Botany Bay and then in Parliament Square. The chair of European history, the senior proctor, and a brilliantly mad math-lecturer, together with other sundry academics, shared my staircases. I don't recall heat, toilet, or water in the ivied buildings; there was a miasmic latrine and the sorriest of taps somewhere in the square.

In my rag of a gown, I pledged life and divinity to the senior dean in exchange for library privileges. Assigned one bath per seven days, I dined formally on commons, answered the junior dean's 9 P.M. curfew-roll call, lofted the classical unmentionables on the university flagpole, and caught first Mass at the Franciscans religiously. And I studied, oblivious to the austerity of my world and the goodness of its people. Later at Cambridge, life was essentially as sumptuous; briefer though not richer in sublimation.

The son of a peasant-farmer of Mayo, neither have I forgotten the four-to-a-bed, dirt-floors, barefeet, brook washes, black bread, and stirabout. If I recall them in the saving tradition of emigrant ways, it is to be astonished by their primal value, not to rattle my sons and daughters with mean-spirited comparisons: there is all too little joy in that. But if my own lads and lasses were required to sprinkle salt on their porridge, it was so lest they completely forgot the existence of contrarieties in their own bountiful world.

The magnificence of one fact of that bounty is the local college of the state university—over 500 hill-and-valley acres of lush sward and skirting waters—where I do my professing. There, the truths of ancient and daily concern find their modern nuance bruited in impressive halls, a legacy of the ease of Governor Nelson Rockefeller's age of legislated philanthropy in New York State. A seasoned, competent, one-you-can-collar faculty, complemented by an administration that is benign, constitute the drive and direction of student learning and living. From such a balanced institutional scenario, it would not have been easy to have foreseen that *Rolling Stone* magazine would cite the college as one of the ten "best" partying schools in the nation; or that last semester, three deaths occurred—all alcohol-related. For a party-culture to have flourished the way it has—and it would seem to pervade the entire state and national systems—basic collegial principles had to have been lost; there must have been a nurturing neglect.

Unpopularly, if by definition, the mission of an academic institution is study. Dormitory-life, fraternities, sororities, clubs, sports, concerts, extramural diversion, etc., are incidental. A library—hardly an incidental—that closes on Friday at 5:00 P.M., reopens Saturday 1:00–5:00 P.M. and Sunday 2:00–10:00 P.M., makes a statement on priorities.

Getting down to the books in most of the residence halls is inconceivable: They are noisome, abused, deafening, and dangerous; rife with an astounding banality of the vulgar, obscene, and profane. They are not conducive to the spirit. Their great crime is their perversion of the quest: the promise and honest purpose of the students. They rob them of a rich, humanizing, and uplifting tradition, and threaten their future. They threaten the future of college.

Originally, the monastic, guild-spun *universitas* and college comprised the holistic professor-student paradigm. Unhappily, the quickening of Adam Smith's organizing, competitive compulsion and its symbiotic loss of humanistic vision have produced, particularly here in America, the dislocation and separation of teacher from pupil. How to deal with this defeat? How to restore a quiet, academic construction to the campus; a fulfilling and serious venture to the staff and student? The steps are few and practicable. The faculty, cooped up in their rarified and wizening isolation, should be reintegrated with the students: faculty offices should be relocated in the residence-hall ground floor. Residence-hall directors should ideally be recruited from faculty. The ambience would be gradually transformed from that Hobbesian game of wilding, defiance, and personal devices now rampant to a community of helpful, aspiring, and curious adults. Rubbing shoulders with faculty, in and out of lecture halls, would provide the quintessential of coherence—the friend, model, and standard of behavior. Abolishing the elitist, subsidized residence-assistants system and replacing it with a general mandatory service by all students would promote an *esprit de corps*.

A final measure that would reinforce the drive to regain the dormitories and which would further serve to address the national educational malady might be the doubling and trebling of study assignments—homework. A recent Carnegie Foundation report on the college community noted the scandalous failure of the American student to study. The occasionally cited charge that the American student is inferior—lags some two-to-four years scholastically behind his European counterpart—is still galling to the citizen, but less preposterous with the years.

Despite all the promising figures, indexes, and indicators of American governmental fiction, what we are hearing is the knell of parting heydays. The mother of all cycles, *the cycle*, moves inexorably toward its full circle as discreetly as the dusk: my generation was—is—the last American ascendancy. This generation will not have it—is not having it—as good as their parents. And that is loudly manifest in the local college. □

T.P. MacGloin is a humanities professor at the State University of New York, Cobleskill.

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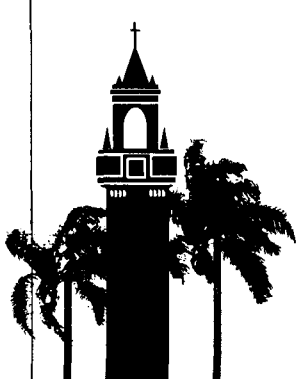

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